

NACHBARSCHAFTSBRIEF

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Friedrichshain

Nummer 3

The winter is here. The days are darker. The nights, colder. But in this darkness we continue to light our own paths. In the cold we find warmth where we can; from each other and from the fires around us. This is the third Nachbarschaftsbrief produced in Friedrichshain since June 2009. The letter communicates on paper what we hope we will eventually be able to communicate in person, through both our words and our actions. Encouraging and engaging face to face exchanges have already begun in the form of the Nachbarschaftstreffen that took place in Oktober. Whilst very positive, we feel that much of the discussion at this meeting was dominated by distracting questions and disagreements relating to the house projects in the area. We understand the interest in these projects and realise their significance in the area, but it is important to us that mere curiosity relating to the ways that we all choose to live does not overshadow the struggle for life itself. The house projects are certainly no utopian dream- far from it- they battle, as we all do, with internal conflicts, money troubles, broken toilets and exploitative landlords. But some valuable experiences and tactics can be gleaned from the house projects. One of these is the principle of self-organisation. In this letter we include more reflections on this meeting, self-organisation, and the specific issue of the spaces that we live in.

Reflections from Treffen

It is clear, from discussions at the meeting, that a common topic of concern for people in this area is that of our living spaces. Most of us need and desire somewhere to live. That is a reality that we cannot escape. But what are the factors and forces that define and control how and where we are able to do this? What prevents us from determining for ourselves the way that we are able to live? How can we begin to fight against this? In order to address these questions, that specifically relate to our living spaces, we would first like to take a few steps back and to look at things with a wider view...

We encounter problems everyday that compromise and undermine our general quality of life: the need to pay rent, to go to work, to prove ourselves, to buy our freedom to travel and to work within demoralising, alienating systems. Where we live is another one of these problems. As we understand it, each one of these problems has some possible short-term solutions. We could not pay insurance to save money for our rent. But there is no community to help us when we get sick and cannot work anymore. We could steal, we could hide away, we could beg, we could borrow, we could move to a house project. We see all these short-term solutions as survival mechanisms.

Yet when we consider the world outside of Friedrichshain and the global restructuring of Capital and inter-State relations, particularly after the economic crisis of 09, we think that short-term solutions will indeed be very short. The development of Capital and the



solidification of the State means there will be no difficulty in wiping away any short-term gains we make. The power that the state now uses to protect capital and destroy anything that hinders its development is truly awesome. Anyone who doubts this need only to walk the streets of Friedrichshain or Kreuzberg at night to see the vast amounts of police equipment and personal being deployed as a political show of force. Friedrichshain is no bullet ridden gangland. So why so much police? However, these solutions are not only short-term, they also fall short in other ways: none of these solutions seriously address the detachment that we face. None of these solutions create solidarity amongst people. None of these solutions invigour our humanity.

When we begin to discuss our everyday problems of survival we always find that they connect to a bigger picture. The problems that we face are the result of a class based society. A society that functions by forcing the majority of the population to

enrich a minority by selling their labour. A society that separates people, distracts them with consumerism and gets them to blame each other for the problems that are obviously a product of the social organisation we currently use.

Mostly, our problems are concerned with work; getting, it, keeping it, losing it, not wanting it. Our problems are probably common to many people in Germany and beyond. We are unskilled workers employed temporarily here and there, often in the service sector. The detachment that is brought about by working in a temporary environment with no security, no leverage and no solidarity amongst workers is acute.

It would be too abstract and predictable to say "let's make capitalism history". We are not politicians. We don't have a perfect plan to do away with the impoverishment of people's lives. So we propose that people address the problems, such as those raised at the Treffen, by self-organising and attacking each problem directly with the essential recognition that these problems are not isolated but are intimately connected with the way that we reproduce society everyday. Without this recognition, even if we self-organise, we will be doomed to mere survival. We must seize more than that from our lives. This doesn't mean demanding that mediators or those in authority change things for us- not politicians, not the press, not cops, not bosses. It means demanding more from ourselves. It means addressing directly what is affecting us. We can do this without a chain of command or a hierarchy.

Self-organisation works in every aspect of our lives. In our living situation, our workplace, our recreation and leisure. And when we begin this process we use methods that can spread easily because we don't want small solutions. We want everyone to do this so we can collectively do away with our problems. So we must communicate. And what better way than on the street and in the bars, cafes and restaurants, the workplace and the school. We are social beings. Face to face we make sense.

What does it mean to self-organise in response to the problems we face relating to our living spaces?

It could be, for example, we organised with our neighbours to fix the leaking drain that has annoyed us all for months? What if we were able show support to someone on our street who has lost their job? Could we organise with each other to stop a new development being built over a green space? What if we took away the signs that forbid us from parking, smoking, or walking our dogs? What if we decided where we should park? What if we

decided that we didn't want cops to drive up and down our street 20-30 times a day, to harrass people and enforce laws that we don't want? What if we told our house owner that we will no longer pay so much rent, or will not pay rent at all? What if, what if, what if....

The Nachbarschaftstreffen showed that we, the people in this area, are doubtful, angry and frustrated with a way of life that is imposed on us by the system that we live in. The question is...what shall we do about it...?